"THE CHANGING THEOLOGY AND THE BIRTH OF THE NATION — THIS MODERN SECTARIAN CLAIM TO THE AMERICANISM OF THE FOUNDERS"

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This year marks just one century and a half since the American Revolution. That seems a long time back, to us, though we sat under a professor whose father had some part in the Revolution. Many have come and gone in this century and a half since, for this is a long time in a new country. To those who lived in 1775 it seemed that the new country then had been going a long time. The Pilgrim Colony of Plymouth was just as far back of them as the Revolution is back of us, or, the Revolution is just midway back between us and the Plymouth Colony.

In 1775 they had been Englishmen here for one hundred and fifty years. We are speaking now of the New England group. A good Englishman then was not only a good subject of his King and Parliament, but also a good member of a Church which itself was a part of being a citizen. For one hundred and fifty years they had been a part of the English government with all the laws and loyalties, except in the matter of the Church. That is, as English subjects they were half rebel from the start. In fact that is what brought them here. They

recognized, and acquiesced in, the civil side of their government but not the ecclesiastical.

Down in Virginia, which was the other nursery of leadership, they were Englishmen in both senses. They were not bothered in mind or conscience about religion. They were both good subjects of the King, and conforming members of the English Church. They just took it for granted in Virginia that the English Church was to be the only Church in the new territory and it was for a long time. In New England it was just about taken for granted that their kind of church was to be the only one and that the English Church was not to come in at all. But the Church of England people did come to New England and they had their King's Chapel or Queen's Chapel which was furnished more or less by successive Kings and Queens. When the first Church of England people came they considered it their right, as good Englishmen, to worship in the houses built by the Colonists, who were not Anglicans. They thought that the Royal Governor ought just to say, "You let these good English Churchmen worship in your churches," and he did say that they might, but the Colonists said that it would have to be, of course, when they were not using them. We read that, on the Sundays when the English Churchmen were to have their service, after the other service was dismissed, our good Puritan ancestors had an unusually long service that day and kept their fellow Englishmen waiting

outside a provokingly long time. In New England this church of theirs, they took for granted, was to be the only one. In the New England parish, which we served first, the story is still told how the old parish minister, as of right, attended the first meeting of the Baptists in the town, went front to the speaker's table and formally dismissed the assembly. He did not see any more need of two churches than of two town halls, or two town-meetings or two Boards of Selectmen. He was the minister of that town and his was its church.

In New England it was not much trouble to become a whole rebel in 1775, for they had been one-half rebel for one hundred and fifty years. They were never English churchmen though they were English citizens. In Virginia they had farther to go to be rebels in 1775 for they were whole Englishmen, both citizens and churchmen. In New England, for the one hundred and fifty years between 1620 and 1775, they were Englishmen on the civil side and Congregational Calvinists on the religious side.

For one hundred and fifty years they had had the novel experience of managing their local churches. They financed them locally. They said locally who should come in, who should not, and who should go out. They disciplined their own. The much larger and more daring venture in self-management was that they said that they could pick out, install and ordain the minister over the church. That is, that discernment, which it

was said was in Houses of Cardinals and Bishops only, which enabled them to pick out those meant to be ministers, our Puritan ancestors said that that discernment was in them, too. And that peculiar virtue which flowed down through the centuries, transmitted by the laying on of hands, which made the true priest, they said that flowed through them, too. They said that they were the priesthood of the congregation and when they ordained and installed a man he was a priest with the best of them. That is, they were not modest in their claims. In that day they were regarded as those who rush in where angels fear to tread. They took upon themselves to decide and to do what it was believed only the ecclesiastically elect could do efficaciously. Religiously they were a terribly forward folk, with the rebel and the non-conforming mind.

Let us put ourselves back in 1750, for people were going to church then and men were giving sermons, and it was discussed then, as now, whether the minister was not going too far, and whether or not certain things should be taken up in the pulpit. In 1750 they were Congregationalists, Calvinists, and English citizens, and fifty years later they were only one of these, Congregationalists. They had ceased to be Calvinists and English citizens. In 1750 there were two lines along which a minister might be unsafe. It was just at this time, 1750, twenty-five years before the Revolution, that a new kind of theology was being preached openly. It

had not a name, as yet, in this country. One might be unsafe because, as some of the older ones noticed, he did not speak on the good old Calvinistic themes, honored them by leaving them alone, or, because he spoke openly against them, or for some new doctrines. Or, he might be unsafe again because he brought politics into the pulpit. If he did he was likely to speak a mild treason, that these colonies ought to resist British rule, and, if he were very unsafe, he might go as far as to say that the colonies should be independent.

As we run the biographies of the young men who came in as ministers in the 1730's, 1740's, and 1750's, we find most of them speaking about these two things, the changing theology, and the probability of a change in their civil allegiance.

It did not follow, by necessity, that one had to be against both Calvinism and British rule. In fact, Dr. Ebenzer Gay, of Hingham, is called the father of American Unitarianism because of his considerable influence in bringing it about, but, Dr. Gay was also a good Tory. In a congregation, made up largely of supporters of the Declaration of Independence, he continued the prayers for the King, or the Queen, all without seriously impairing his usefulness, say his biographers, a rather remarkable testimony to the forebearance and the charity of the Hingham congregation. But most of them were heterodox in both senses, they were against both Calvinism and British rule.

So we find Jonathan Mayhew, of the West Church of Boston, with these two distinctions to his credit: he was the first of the untrinitarians here, and, his was the most influential voice for civil liberty, a torch-bearer who lighted the fires. We read of Samuel West, minister of our Church in New Bedford, deciphering a code letter for Washington which brought some treason to light, and John Lathrop's Church in Boston being called, by the British, "a nest of hornets," and Zedekiah Sanger, of Duxbury, giving his first sermon, July 3, 1776, from the text, "Proclaim liberty to all the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof." John Prince, our minister in Salem, happened to be in State Street and saw the Boston Massacre. He was at the conference which decided to dump the tea into the harbor. He carried the news to General Warren that the British troops were going toward Lexington.

It is one hundred and fifty years this morning since the Minute Men were called out on Lexington Common to try to stop the British on their way from Boston to Concord. Captain Parker, who commanded, was the grandfather of our Theodore Parker. Colonel Barrett and Major Buttrick who led the men at Concord Bridge were of the Parish Church in Concord and the men who defended, called up on this April morning to fire the shot heard round the world, were from the Actons, Littleton, and the territory at the back between Concord and the present site of Camp Devens. The minister of

the Concord Church then was the grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Only last summer we put up a tablet on the side of our old church in Brooklyn, Connecticut, to Israel Putnam who was the ranking officer at the Battle of Bunker Hill. These are just a few of the connections of our ministers and laymen with the events this day celebrates. These were from churches and families which, at the time of the Revolution, were questioning both the royal right of a theology, and the royal right of King George. From 1775 to 1825, the division of these old parish churches had gone on until there were enough bearing the Unitarian name to organize an Association in 1825, the Centenary of which we observe this year. Far be it from the fact that these made the whole fight and established the country. Those from other churches served. We are simply naming our own.

Today, when theological politics and political theology are getting mischievously active, it seems worth while to recall the connection between religious and civil liberty. The effort is now widely organized, and loudly vocal, to proclaim that sound Americanism has for one of its indispensable requisites a certain brand of theology. The organization, which takes it upon itself to say what sound Americanism is, veils its face, lest its full glory should be too much for us, but, it has let us behold this much of its veiled glory, viz: that to be an American, true to the principles of the founders, one

must not only have his racial hates but also he must hold to the special doctrines approved by that organization. That is, the Klan is the militant side of a brand of theology. Billy Sundayism and Bryanism must be embraced to entitle one to belong to that Americanism of the type proclaimed by the founders of the Republic. One who loses the religious import of this body of people who are saying today what it is to be an American, loses sight of what gives that body its heat and its going power. The Klan is a theologically committed organization and everywhere it is found in alliance with, and the proponent of, a certain type of religious thought. In its writings and by its acts it puts its stamp of approval upon a certain kind of church, holding a certain form of religious thought, and this is to be an American, and this only is to be an American. We know of no instance where the Klan has shown anything but the greatest hostility to any kind of forward looking church or religious thought. We do not hold that theology, and we have not for a one hundred years, and these men who changed their theology were the very fountain head of the very principles of the American tradition.

We do not wish to rule by force of numbers; we do not wish to legislate our beliefs into the statute books; we do not wish to make any unhistorical claims of influence in founding the Republic, neither do we wish to

be told that we are not quite full patriots because we are not theologically sound.

What we have in mind today is to give reason for ourselves and our children to claim our full birthright, as Americans, in this church of our choice, with the thought that seems right to us. These men in pulpit and pew, of these churches of New England which took our name just after the Revolution, lifted up their voices, among the first, for the very idea of an American nation, and, at the same time they were lifting their voices for better doctrines about man and about God. A new church and a new country came at the same time. Religious liberty and civil liberty were twin conceived and twin born and twain do they live. These were the very men, naturally, who would get the idea first. For one hundred and fifty years they had had church independence and hence were only one-half English subjects. The things of God and his church were much more delicate matters to lay their hands upon than the government of men, and they had already done that. A people who could take it upon themselves to do what cardinals, bishops, the very elect of God, had always done; a people who could presume to usurp the seats of the mighty and the sacrosanct and thrust their own choice in making a church, and in making ministers, it was not strange that they should presume to trust their judgment in human affairs of government. If they could interpret their Bible, make priests, do their own

laying on of hands, it was no novel venture, after entering these sacred precincts, to say that they could vote their own taxes, make their own laws, and elect their own rulers. Self-government in religion is the big daring step and it is no daring at all, after that, to stand on their own feet in lesser affairs. Historically people who flamed for religious freedom spoke loudest, and with the greatest conviction, for civil liberty. "An association of free churches? Why not a nation of free communities?" is the way it appeared to them. Whoever since have helped to carry out the idea, and whoever may live under it now, the idea itself was born, where it naturally would be born, with those who stood upon their own feet before God and would do the same before men.

Different Churches in America like to give out now and then, in their most ambitious moods, that they are the American Church. The name is used sometimes so that we may get accustomed to it and come in time to use it. There is no American Church, and, unless we all go to sleep and prove ourselves degenerate sons of sires, there will be no American Church. We should make no such claim for ourselves and we are just as loath to sit by, unmoved and unrebellious, when any other Church makes the claim. Some of our churches have three hundred years of history now, since they were organized, and three hundred years cover all that has happened here that pertains to being an American.

We do not presume to say to what form of doctrine any American must incline, or prefer, or support. Having been in as a Church, when the principles of good Americanism were defined, and having helped to define them, we do not take kindly today to any kind of Americanism that leaves us out by definition. Having been here from the beginning, and, having had some part in defining what it is to be an American, we ought to be clear upon this point. When anyone, by implication, definition, or legislation, directly or indirectly, says to another that he has to support his doctrine to be an American, that moment the true American doctrine is repudiated. One who commends his standing as a citizen by the rightness of his religious doctrine or detracts from the standing of another by the wrongness of his, has failed to see, and neglected to practice, the first principle of the Americanism of the founders.

Any individual or any organization that uses those holding the same doctrines to establish that as the standard of true citizenship, with any implication by word or act that those of other doctrines cannot be as true citizens as they, that individual, or that organization, is reviving just what the whole American movement arose specifically to send to oblivion for ever. Any man who allows any religious tag to add to one's standing as a citizen or to detract from it, belongs to Asia and the older Europe. In mind, culture and spirit he belongs to the civilization where Allah is both church

and state and the call to highest service is the call to Holy War. He belongs to the ecclesiastical-political age of Europe where a man's standing as a citizen *was* determined by subscription to doctrines approved by the state.

Let us know this for ourselves and let our children know it, for, they will have use for it here before they die. Whoever may arise to define what it is to be a true American, or to connect it up with any crude theology, or any socially or politically ambitious church, let us insist that we know the birthplace and lineage of Americanism, and that we are in the line of succession. With our theology, whatever it is now, or however often we may change it or improve it, we defer to none in our loyalty to the principles that gave us our distinction as a nation.

If nothing else from this day survives in our minds, let this survive that these principles were spoken first by those who alternated their sermons on a changing thought of God with sermons on a changing earthly sovereign, a self-made human government. These words spoken were translated into deeds by those in the pews. The free church and the free state are stocks from the same root.